“Shakespheres”: Cross-Media and Non-Anglophone Shakespeare in Contemporary Times

Saturday 13 April
4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Marriott LL1: Salon G

Abstracts (in order of submission)

Amir Khan

***Ah Q* and *Hamlet*: Materialism meets Modernity**

Lu Xun’s *The True Story of Ah Q* remains “new” and “modern” enough for audiences to discern the thematization of a specifically non-Western aesthetic category: the possibility for historical reset. By “reset” is meant an understanding that one’s current linguistic order is ossified, requires complete overhaul. Such knowledge is uniquely *Ah Q*’s, as the possibility of historical reset has never been faced by Western sensibilities in any serious capacity. Yet arguably, long ago, *Hamlet* was in the same position as *Ah Q* is now; yet the record of English-speaking imperial domination of the planet means *Hamlet* cannot be recognized as thematizing the possibility of history as aleatory. The entire critical tradition surrounding the play works to deny any such possible reading. Yet considerable evidence suggests that interpretation of the play nowadays is exhausted, trapped between the exploration of atemporal individual psyche on the one hand and the play of totalitarian historical forces one the other. But juxtaposed against the true possibility of reset brought to bear in “third-word” stories like *Ah Q*, *Hamlet*’s worth may or may not be salvaged from its current ossified imperial status.

Emma de Beus

Adapting Problematic Comedies for the 21st Century: *Frivolous Wife* and *The Māori Merchant of Venice*

In this essay, I introduce the notion of refracted adaptations, which feature translations of language as well as transmogrification of time and setting. The story remains intact and wholly recognizable, but the words out of which it is composed differ, often quite distinctly, with sociocultural, linguistic, geographical, and adaptive consequence. Refraction, a term borrowed from optical physics, is an ideal term for understanding the specific adaptive process at work in this form. As William C. Robertson explains, “[w]henever light travels from one substance to another, it bends. This bending is known as refraction” (Robertson 2002, 7). In more pedestrian terms, imagine a straw in a glass of

water. If examined from the side, the straw will appear to bend at the point where it shifts between being in the air to being in the water–both of which are, of course, transparent. In a refracted adaptation, the source material bends to the requirements of a production's setting, particularly in terms of language, time period, and location. These issues of language and setting, which are at the heart of refracted adaptation, are the primary form of Global Shakespeares. This paper will focus primarily on such cases by considering the particular potential for refracted adaptation on Shakespeare's "problematic" comedies, drawing on *Frivolous Wife*–Lim Won-kook's 2008 retelling of *The Taming of the Shrew*–and *Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Wēniti*–Don Selwyn's 2002 version of *The Merchant of Venice*. Although A. G. Harmon's observation that "the idea of a separate category for 'problematic' works has met with less approval" in recent years and that "the tag has become more convenient than significant," some of Shakespeare's plays present problems for 21st century productions (Harmon 2004, 3). This paper will consider two of the worst "offenders" in this respect: *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*. These "comedies" often receive considerable adaptive attention in order to make them palatable for 21st century audiences. As such, this paper will consider these two case studies as an intertwined presentation of how refracted adaptation can provide the particular attention needed by potentially "offensive comedies."

Marinela Golemi

***Othello, The Moor of Vlora:* Local Race Politics in Albanian Novel Tradaptations**

In this essay, I focus on Ben Blushi's 2009 Albanian novel adaptation titled *Otello, Arapi I Vlorës* (*Othello, The Moor of Vlora*), which metabolizes *Othello*'s racial politics to reflect and respond to local race issues and Albania's racialized identity within Europe. As a means of relating Albania's non-European identity to Europeanness, the novel retells Othello's tale to make Albania complicit in the European journey responsible for Othello becoming a racialized other. The adaptation then constructs a shared history of race politics which perpetuates a racialized ideology, while also serving as a palimpsest to show how racial identity and race politics are reconfigured through contact with multiple racial others. The novel relates Othello's racialized experiences in Albania with Albania's racialized history in Europe by transporting Shakespeare's Othello in Albania, and consequently, Albania in *Othello*. Specifically, in Blushi's adaptation race is encoded and transported via the silent labour of translating Othello as an Albanian Moor whose racial identity is tied to religion and migration. In return, the novel injects Albania's race politics in Shakespeare's *Othello* by conflating Shakespeare's Westernized ideology of race with the racial discourse of medieval and modern Albania. In this exchange process, the racial ideologies shared can enforce racist policies that harm migrants and citizens just as easily as they can support a multifarious understanding of race that leads to improved anti-racist public policies. By making the palimpsestic exchange of race politics obvious, non-Anglophone Shakespeare novel adaptations highlight the need for intercultural

communication regarding local and international policies on race, ethnicity, migration, and human rights.

Laina Southgate

"Physicians Rather than Judges:" How Shakespeare Tied Finland to the West During the Cold War

On April 6th, 1948, Finland and the Soviet Union signed The Finno-Soviet Treaty, or, The Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. Under the treaty, the Soviets aimed to deter Western or Allied Powers from attacking the Soviet Union through Finnish territory, essentially making Finland a buffer zone.[1] In exchange, as stated in Article 6 of the treaty, "The High Contracting Parties pledge themselves to observe the principle of the mutual respect of sovereignty and integrity and that of non-interference in the internal affairs of the other state." [2] Finland, in short, would remain a liberal democracy so long as the treaty was upheld. The 1948 Finno-Soviet Treaty complicated Finland's global position as it connected Finland to Soviet Russia during the Cold War even though the country was not part of the Soviet Bloc.

In the intervening years of the Cold War, Finland was neutral, and this was viewed within Finland as "a pragmatic instrument for keeping Finland on the Western side of the Iron curtain."[3] Indeed, on October 19, 1961, Finnish president Urho Kekkonen delivered a speech to the General Assembly of the United Nations in which he advances the idea that Finns "see ourselves as physicians rather than judges; it is not for us to pass judgment nor to condemn, it is rather to diagnose and to try to cure."[4] Despite this stance, or because of it, the West increasingly treated Finland with suspicion, and the term "Finlandization" was coined to mean "that process or state affairs in which, under the cloak of maintaining friendly relations with the Soviet Union, the sovereignty of a country becomes reduced." [5]

Shakespeare is used during this time as a tool by which the Finns could culturally align themselves with the West, and indeed the Finnish National Theatre frequently featured Shakespeare's plays as part of their repertoire. After he accepted the position of Theatre Director of the Finnish National Theatre in 1949, for instance, Arvi Kivimaa declared that his mission "was to ensure Finland's close ties with the West." One way in which he did this was to invite international directors and theatre troupes to the FNT, and indeed "British actors were deemed to represent a higher level of the dramatic arts."[6]

Through analyses of archival resources pertaining to the Finnish National Theatre Shakespeare repertoire, as well as the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Peter Brook's 1964 *King Lear* in Helsinki, and Peter Hall's 1967 *Macbeth*, this paper will explore how Shakespeare, by virtue of standing outside the East-West divide, allowed Finnish artists to negotiate their culturally liminal position vis-à-vis the two blocs.

[1] Koski, Pirkko. *Finland's National Theatre 1974–1991: The Two Decades of Generational Contests, Cultural Upheavals, and International Cold War Politics*. Taylor and Francis, 2022

[2] "The Agreement of Friendship, Coöperation, and Mutual Assistance between The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and The Republic of Finland."

[3] Aunesluoma, Juhana. "Neutrality as Identity? Finland's Quest for Security in the Cold War." *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol.18, pp.51-78.

[4] Kekkonen, Urho. "Finland's Attitude to Problems in World Politics." https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/9980/TMP.objres.1455.html?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

[5] Laquer, Walter. *The Political Psychology of Appeasement. Finlandization and Other Unpopular Essays."* Routledge, 1980.

[6] Koski, Pirkko. *Finland's National Theatre 1974–1991: The Two Decades of Generational Contests, Cultural Upheavals, and International Cold War Politics*. Taylor and Francis, 2022

Ivy Hao Liu

Hamlet in Kun Opera and the Fashioning of the Protean "I"

The Kun-opera *I, Hamlet*, which premiered in 2016 and was revived in 2020 and 2023, is an experimental Kun-opera one-person show, despite Kun opera being an ancient genre of *xiqu* (traditional Chinese opera), which contrasts with the notion of "experimental". It derives from the plot development of the original text, but is a collage of scenes and lines from *Hamlet* rendered in Kunqu style. It amalgamates theatrical innovations and traditional *xiqu* artistry, and conveys a potent expression of the profound theme of uncertainty and solitude that resonates with modern people. Hence, this production is construed as a work of art that manifests subjectivity, as is evident in its title, *I, Hamlet*. The paper accentuates the "I" as the origin for both the contemporary psyche and the venerable art tradition. The discussion of the play emanates from two observations: how the stage design and the versatile actor epitomize the dichotomy of "one" and "many", and how Kun-opera artistry articulates Hamletian vacillation and ambiguity. By discussing the meanings of the "I", the paper strives to comprehend the subjectivity of the artist that synthesizes originality and conventionality in theatre, inviting a discussion of how the deep themes of Shakespeare's play resonate with the aesthetics of an ancient genre such as Kunqu opera.

Anston Bosman

Salvaging from Shakespeare: Indigenizing Theater through Language and Protocol

In recent decades, Indigenous theatre artists in former British settler-colonies have often turned to translating the plays of William Shakespeare with a goal of revitalizing endangered languages. In so doing, Native writers and performers have transformed dramas that were once tools of colonial

assimilation into vehicles of linguistic advocacy and cultural resurgence. What are the risks and rewards of such "takeovers," and how do they serve the communities from which they spring? My case study is *Pawâkan Macbeth*, a multilingual adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy, which was conceived in 2017, performed on tour in Alberta, Canada, in early 2020, and is now undergoing revision for the Stratford Festival. Set on the Great Plains in 1869, *Pawâkan*—subtitled *A Cree Takeover*—blends English with Plains Cree, Nakoda, and Métis French. Along with Indigenous language, the "takeover" enacts an open-ended protocol of co-creation that blends community engagement, cultural responsibility, and artistic freedom. Drawing on interviews with writer-director Reneltta Arluk and Cree translator Darlene Auger, this paper shows how Pawâkan evokes a precarious "Cree frontier" where First Nations meet, negotiate, and clash with one another as well as with the incursive Canadian authorities. In this linguistic and cultural contact zone, *Pawâkan* breathes new life into ancient legends and neglected histories alike.

Introductions to Alternative Discussions

(* Besides presentations of research papers, a special design of this seminar is three "alternative discussions" on cross-cultural productions of Shakespeare.)

Donna Woodford-Gormley and Alfredo Michel Modenessi

Romeo Y Julieta

Romeo Y Julieta is a bilingual (Spanish and English) radio play of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* co-produced by the New York Public Theatre and WNYC in March of 2021. It was adapted by Saheem Ali and Ricardo Pérez González from Alfredo Michel Modenessi's translation. Unlike many bilingual Shakespeares, including *Dos Familias,* another production based on Modenessi's script, *Romeo Y Julieta* does not use bilingualism to signify contrast or conflict. It does not have one family speaking Spanish while the other speaks English. Rather, the two households are alike in dignity and in bilingualism. The play thus addresses and incorporates the linguistic actuality of communities, of performers proceeding from these communities, and of audiences for whom the coextensive use of two languages is a fundamental condition of life, a way of being. Over twenty years ago, Walter Mignolo called this kind of diglossic praxis "bilanguaging," describing it as "a fundamental condition of border thinking,"[1] distinct from "bilingualism," the ability to use two languages proficiently according to need. Evidently, bilanguaging is a category within bilingualism, but it is not just linguistic praxis. Bilanguaging is "a way of life between languages: a dialogical, ethic, aesthetic, and political process of social transformation," [2] where the free flow between linguistic codes—and thereby between cultural and existential codes—is the foundation of world-thinking and world-

making.

[1] Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking. Princeton UP, 2008, 253.
[2] Mignolo, 265.

Jun Li

Re-contextualized & Xiqu-stylized *Julius Caesar*

"How many ages hence / Shall this our lofty scene be acted over, / In states unborn and accents yet unknown"—this "anticipated retrospection" resonates in a 20-minute piece of *Julius Caesar*, the first-prize winner of the 2nd Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival in 2006. This UIBE (University of International Business & Economics) students' adaptation recontextualizes Shakespeare's tragedy from Rome around 44 BC to an unspecified ancient time in China and renders it with *xiqu* (戏曲 Chinese traditional opera) integration and stylization, featuring *tai chi* (太极拳 traditional Chinese shadow boxing), music, costume, conventionally stylized movements, etc. To distinguish itself from most other *xiqu* adaptations of Shakespeare, this work is especially creditable in its attempt to explore *xiqu* "spirit" in terms of symbolism, xuni (虚拟 mime-like style to alter, refine and amplify reality), and rhythm in an internal more than external sense, while keeping the Bard's original lines in English. Thus, with this production in focus, our discussion shall address such questions as "why *xiqu* is compatible with Shakespeare", "how *xiqu* and Shakespeare can mutually enrich and invigorate each other through cross-fertilization", "how new 'spheres' such as *xiqu* can reflect and reveal more fully the radiance and richness of 'SHAKEsphere'", etc.

Rebekah Bale

A production scheduled for March at the Hong Kong Arts Festival